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ABSTRACT

The historical development of the liberal arts college in the United States and its status in the 1980s are discussed. Although for nearly 300 years, liberal arts colleges have been a dominant force in North American higher education, in the 1980s they have come to constitute a small and decreasing portion of postsecondary education. The position of the liberal arts college began to recede after World War II. At least two factors contributed to the maintenance of the English form or pattern in America: American colleges were designed to serve a particular constituency and were relatively isolated from one another; and they were responsible to local boards of control consisting of lay persons. By the 1920s the liberal arts college had accepted a combination of basic education and specialized education. The curriculum continued to expand, and so did the degrees, until by the 1970s, 650 bachelor's degrees could be identified. Debates have continued over the proportions of the curriculum to be devoted to general education, the major, and electives. The critical element is the ability of liberal arts colleges to retain their historic orientation while adapting to the expectations of the contemporary student. Some liberal arts colleges stand between the purely comprehensive and the purely liberal arts types. (SW)

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THE AMERICAN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE EIGHTIES

DINOSAUR OR PHOENIX?

Background Paper Prepared for The
Study Group on the Condition of Excellence in
American Higher Education

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Introduction: The Form and the Ideal

The American liberal arts college of the 1980s presents a study of accommodation successful and sometimes less successful of a form and ideal. Both form and ideal have roots in the distant past; the form is a legacy of twelfth century Europe and the first universities in the West; the ideal is a legacy of fifth and fourth century B.C. Greece and the cycle of education of the free and responsible citizen of Athens. To paraphrase George P. Schmidt's (1957) reference to the curriculum of Dunster's early seventeenth century boarding school on the banks of the Charles,[1] the path from twelfth century Paris to the American liberal arts college is devious, but recognizable, and the path from fifth century Athens to the ideal of liberal arts education embodied in the same American institution similarly is devious, but recognizable. It is as these two strains met and encountered the Puritan/Calvinist conviction that proof of God's favor was to be found in productive work that we have the roots for what is both the strength and the weakness of the American institutions of the twentieth century that are labeled liberal arts colleges and that are the subject of this essay.

Although for nearly 300 years liberal arts institutions have been a dominant force in North American higher education, in the 1980s they have come to constitute a small and decreasing portion of the postsecondary education commonwealth. From 1640, the year Harvard College reopened under Henry Dunster, well into the early decades of the 1900s the independent or free-standing (non-university affiliated) undergraduate liberal arts college was the widely accepted means to higher education for most American students and served as the door through which many passed to advanced study. At the turn

of the century a French scholar (Levasseur, 1899) describing American higher education, observed that two-thirds of the students enrolled in American higher institutions were to be found in undergraduate [liberal arts] colleges. Well into the twentieth century these institutions continued to attract a large share of the students seeking baccalaureate degrees--even as the more complex universities, the teachers colleges, agricultural colleges and junior colleges were growing in number, size and influence.

The years following World War II brought many changes to American society and to American education. Postsecondary education increased in type, scope and number of institutions, and the relative position of the liberal arts college began to recede. In 1955 some 732 institutions were identified as liberal arts colleges out of a total of 1,854 higher institutions; the liberal arts colleges registered 26 percent of the fall 1955 enrollment (Educational Policies Commission, 1957). They were described as "the oldest and most common American institutions of higher education" and as unique institutions, "without counterpart in other countries." By 1969 the number had decreased slightly to 721 enrolling less than 10 percent of the total postsecondary students; but the total number of higher institutions had now reached 2,837. By 1976 the Carnegie Council identified only 583 liberal arts colleges, enrolling 5 percent of the total postsecondary students; and the total number of higher institutions was now 3,074 (Carnegie Council, 1976)

It is little wonder that those observing the decline in position of the liberal arts institutions should begin seriously to question the continued viability of these colleges. Mayhew (1962) characterized the liberal arts colleges as "a minority group in the presence of a majority composed of other, larger and more complex types of institutions of higher learning," and saw the attempt of these colleges to carry on the liberal tradition in the face

of the vocational orientation of much of American life exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible. Morris Keeton and Conrad Hilberry (1969) began the report on the study of selected liberal arts colleges during 1965-67 with the words, "The typical private liberal arts college of the mid-twentieth century is obsolete." More recently, Henry Steele Commager (1977) answered his own question "Can the American College Survive?" by writing that the free-standing liberal arts college was in trouble, that it was having both an identity crisis and a financial crisis and that he could only wonder if the college could "extricate itself from these troubles which now undermine its prosperity and imperil its existence." Ira Winn (1976) referred to the prediction that as many as "500 small colleges of the liberal tradition are at or near the financial brink." In view of the calculation of the Carnegie Council that there were only 583 liberal arts colleges in 1976, Winn's reference would leave few of the institutions alive in the not too distant future.

Stadtman (1980) suggested that it is not so much dissolution as transformation that threatens the future of the liberal colleges. Through taking on more of the character of comprehensive colleges they are in danger of losing their special identity; ahead is the "impending bankruptcy and failure of the liberal colleges," because "the liberal arts cannot be served in the special way that is possible when they are virtually the exclusive concern of an institution." Kerr (Keeton, 1971) is more optimistic in his introductory statement to a later Keeton volume; he writes of "a renaissance [of the liberal arts colleges]," because "they are by nature more adaptable to the new concerns of so many students, while the more massive institutions are clearly in greater trouble--some of them are turning to their own internal liberal arts colleges to respond to student's concerns." Keeton's own analysis is less encouraging.

Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984) found surprising vitality among the 23 institutions in a national sample studied over a two-year period of time. They reported that these colleges not only survived the difficulties of the 1970s and the years preceding, but were entering the 1980s with a measure of strength and a determination to maintain a liberal arts emphasis--but the colleges acknowledge also that the 1980s could be more difficult than the 1970s.[2] Astin and Lee (1972) characterized that segment of the liberal arts population they labeled as "invisible colleges" as preoccupied with survival, limited in academic resources, in financial difficulty, lacking a sense of identity and facing severe competition from other institutions. Anderson's (1977) study of forty single sex and/or religious colleges between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s found over half of these institutions having experienced significant change in character, but said also that to determine whether such changes would ultimately be successful was "not unexpectedly . . . complex." It was difficult to predict what the future would hold for these institutions.

Judgments about the viability of the American liberal arts college, often drawing on different sources of information, or shaped by different research questions, or based on the examination of different samples of institutions, obviously are mixed. Although the darker predictions appear to outnumber the more optimistic assessments, the colleges have survived, have increased in enrollments (if slowly), have experienced renewal as institutions closed are replaced by new foundations.[3] What then is the status of the liberal arts college in the 1980s? Are recent problems only matters of passing concern, or are they symptoms of an uncertain future?

It is the thesis of this essay that resolution of such questions is more

likely to come from a reexamination of the historical development of both the form and the ideal [supra, p. 1]. It is in this history that one finds the language, the rhetoric and the traditions that underlie these institutions. We examine first the form and then the ideal.

The Form of the College.--Within ten years after the Act of Foundation of what was later to be named Harvard College, there were in the colony of the Massachusetts Bay Company approximately 100 Cambridge graduates and a third as many sons of Oxford (Rudolph, 1962). It was inevitable that the new college would pattern itself after the older foundations of England. In spite of limited resources and the lack of an established body of masters and scholars that had made Oxford and Cambridge possible centuries before, by 1650 Henry Dunster was calling for a structure that would identify the college as a Corporation of President and Fellows. In this request Dunster was placing Harvard College in the tradition of the English universities and their source, the University of Paris. In that tradition the term "college" had a special meaning.

It has been said that college and university were terms used interchangeably (Schmidt, 1957). While correct in reference to the earliest efforts of the Western academic institutions, it is not accurate to equate university and college as these institutions of learning assumed more formal structure (Cobban, 1975).[4] The term universitas as a general term applicable to any kind of aggregate or body of persons with common purposes and independent legal status became the convenient shorthand label for the academic body only in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. An academic corporation had the right to grant degrees, and a complete academic universitas was one that possessed the higher faculties of theology, law and medicine. The

collegium came to be associated with the early hospices for the advanced students in the academic universitas. The first such hospice established for the University of Paris was one purchased by Jocius de Londinis in 1180 at the Hospital of the Blessed Mary of Paris, the Hôtel Dieu, near the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and intended to house eighteen "poor clerks", from which it was named the College des Dix-Huit.[5] The later establishment by Robert de Sorbon, chaplain to Louis IX, in 1257 or 1258 provided the kind of governance structure that came to characterize the later colleges of the University.

At first designed to provide maintenance and support for older students who could not otherwise afford to stay at the university, the colleges began to take on instructional responsibilities with the decision of the College d' Harcourt to admit paying scholars and for the master and/or his assistants to provide tutorial help for the scholars in the college. This instructional responsibility increased as the number of paying scholars increased. At Navarre, the master was required "diligently to hear the lessons of the Scholars studying in the Faculty of Arts and faithfully to instruct them alike in life and in doctrine." (Shachner, 1938). Earlier in the development of the university, the arts students were left much on their own, although to study in the higher faculties, one had to master the seven liberal arts which by then were the necessary prerequisite for study in the university, especially in theology. With the assumption of more instructional responsibility in the colleges, the colleges admitted younger students and soon became identified with the preparatory studies in the arts. The limited lectures and reviews provided in the colleges to supplement the teaching in the university schools gradually expanded, and in time the colleges were able to provide full-time employment for the more qualified regent masters. By the fifteenth century the colleges were competing with the schools of the university, and the

University of Paris was changing from a voluntary association of Masters, each with his individual school and his own quota of pupils, to an association of colleges with full-time masters.

A new era began with the coming of the Jesuits to Paris in 1540 and the opening of the Collège de Clermont in 1563. Soon competing with the University of Paris, the Collège de Clermont provided a full secondary education as well as courses in theology. Rapidly the Jesuits developed an extensive secondary system throughout France, and by the middle of the seventeenth century the Society of Jesus had become the dominant educators of France. The development of the secondary schools under the Jesuits and the increasing concentration of the colleges of the Faculty of Arts on providing the preparatory work required for admission to the superior, or higher faculties, in time transformed the arts curriculum effectively into the work of the secondary schools. With the reorganization of the French educational system in 1802, the lycées became the successors of the colleges, but were no longer residential or higher institutions. A somewhat similar development, but adapted to the German structures, made in Germany the gymnasium the preparatory school for the university. On the continent, the training in the arts were separated from the university and became the task of the classical secondary schools.

In England, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge evolved out of general hospices into teaching units as in France--with one important difference; the English foundations from the beginning were independent corporations whose members owned and administered their endowments. The independence of the colleges was increased when Elizabeth approved new statutes in 1570 which gave to the masters of the colleges the authority to elect the vice chancellor of Cambridge. Oxford colleges gained similar authority in 1628.

The idea of the arts college as a residential and instructional entity designed to prepare students for admission to the advanced faculties that constituted the university proper had already experienced significant changes in France and Germany when the first American institutions were established. By the middle of the seventeenth century the ancient French universities were in decline, almost displaced by the Jesuit system of colleges, and these colleges were essentially secondary schools. By the middle of the next century the University Faculty of Arts had also taken on the character of a pre-university secondary unit. In Germany, the split between preparatory arts schools and the professional university had begun after the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the separation was almost complete, and the preparatory work was relegated to the classical secondary school, the gymnasium.

In England, in the early seventeenth century, the arts colleges were still at the height of their power as residences and teaching units. The superior, or advanced faculties were, by comparison, underdeveloped, and the fellows of the colleges found themselves involved more and more in the instruction of undergraduates primarily dedicated to the single aim of the "virtuous education of youth." (Curtis, 1959). As the seventeenth century wore on, the all-university lectures regained importance, and the emphasis in the undergraduate colleges shifted from general studies to specialized studies in the arts. Later the function of preparatory level arts study came to be the responsibility of the secondary grammar schools.

It was the English college of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that became the informing pattern for the North American colonial colleges, and while the English colleges continued to evolve, the colonial

colleges maintained and perpetuated the received structure. It is not surprising that the North American institutions began with the English pattern; indeed it would have been surprising if they had not done so. And, in retrospect, it is not surprising that the form, once adopted, underwent little change in the next 150 years. At least two factors contributed to the maintenance of the form: (1) the American colleges were self-contained institutions, created to serve a particular constituency and were relatively isolated from one another; (2) they were independent foundations, responsible to local boards of control consisting of lay persons. As self-contained institutions, geographically isolated, they remained small, limited in scope and equipped to provide little more than instruction in the arts seqeunce; necessity became a virtue. As independent foundations, they were created by and responsive to conservative lay boards.

With the form of the residential preparatory school firmly in place, the new condition of nineteenth century America could only lead to continuing tension between the established form and growing demands for new types of education. From the beginning, the colonies that were to become the United States also had a deep pragmatic strain. Calvinist New England found in productive work proof of God's election and bounty. The development of the nation required doers as well as thinkers.

Then, as the nation expanded westward, the colleges followed, for an important way of proving that a new settlement would soon be a great city was "to provide it as quickly as possible with all of the metropolitan hallmarks," which included not only a newspaper and a hotel, but an institution of higher learning, or at least one that aspired to be a seat of higher learning (Boorstin, 1965). Colleges or institutions aspiring to be colleges were springing up overnight, and many disappeared as quickly. It is estimated that by 1860 as many as 700 colleges had been created and had gone out of existence.

The received form of the college was hard pressed to meet the new demands. Philip Lindsley turned down the presidency at Princeton to become the first president of the University of Nashville and argued in his inaugural that "the farmer, the mechanic, the manufacturer, the merchant, the sailor must be educated." (Rudolph, 1962) James Marsh, as president of the University of Vermont, was creating, or attempting to create, new programs in that institution. Jacob Abbott spearheaded reforms at Amherst, and although the reforms were shortlived, they pointed the way to broader and more inclusive curricula. In the face of such threats to the received form, the Yale Corporation in 1828 issued a report calculated to call the American colleges back to the agenda, holding that the form of the college was that of a preparatory institution, "to lay the foundation of a superior education." (Hofstadter and Smith, Vol. 1, 1961)

The Ideal.--The American liberal arts college was heir to an ideal as well, and the report of the Yale Corporation was concerned also with the ideal. The ideal was rooted in the Athens of Aristotle, but the path from Aristotle to the Cambridge of Dunster, though recognizable, was devious, and the modification that occurred between Athens, and Paris-Oxford-Cambridge, and the New World Cambridge were profound.

In the Greece of Aristotle, education was viewed as an art. The term which we translate as education is in the Greek παιδεία (paideia) a term meaning "culture" as well as "education" and implying growth in experience as well as knowledge. Hellenistic Greek education was divided among a whole series of teachers. Elementary school masters γραμματιστής (grammastistes) taught the young person to read, write and count, and perhaps to draw. Music was under the instruction of a music master μουσικός (mousikos). Gymnastics was taught by a professional teacher παιδοτρίβης (paidotribes). Then, around the age of

twelve, the young person began the study of literature, of Homer and poetry in general under a κριτικός (kritikos) or γραμματικός (grammatikos). At that time study began also in advanced math under the mathematics master γεωμέτρης (geometres). The whole process, conducted over time constituted the ἐγκύκλιος (encyclios). The term ἐγκύκλιος (encyclios) means literally "ordinary" or "of every day occurrence" as well as "cyclic." Thus the ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία (encyclios paideia) was the education of the freeman, the Greek citizen as distinct from the foreigner or slave (Gwyn, 1926).

It was this ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία (encyclios paideia) that became in Latin the "artes liberales" or "liberalis disciplina," the liberal arts. Seneca takes note of that which the Greeks call ἐγκύκλιοι (encyclioi) and the Romans call "liberales."

For the Greeks, specialization was unknown. Knowledge was not of facts but of the general principles that would later help one to a proper use of the knowledge possessed. It was the kind of knowledge that opens the mind to the possibility of discovering the basic principles of a science. Each science has its own art (ars, τέχνη techne) framed by human reason and binding together the details of knowledge in a single coherent system.

The way in which the encyclios paideia was modified in the Roman experience is fascinating, but not germane to this short dicussion. It is enough to note that Cicero and Quintilian, finding in the Greek mode of education the kind of instruction appropriate to the training of the orator, were looking beyond the man in the street and tailoring the Greek heritage to their own needs.

Over time the contents of the encyclios paideia became more or less standardized, and the Greek experience modified by Roman experience was carried

into Western Europe through Martianus Capella (410 A.D.) in the allegory of the seven liberal arts (Capella; Stald, et al, 1977). Other writings, such as those of Boethius, Priscian and Donatus and Cassiodorus' and Isidor's introductions to all seven disciplines were also widely circulated.

While Martianus Capella provided the encyclopedic description of the seven liberal arts, it was Cassiodorus (477-565 A.D.) who shifted in significant ways the nature and function of the arts. Cassiodorus, who held positions of responsibility under Theodric, retired to a monastery which he had founded and organized according to the Benedictine rule. There, he played a significant role in fostering the preservation of secular as well as ecclesiastical knowledge among the monks, giving the Benedictines the impulse to intellectual work for which they were distinguished during the medieval times. It was he who found scriptural sanction for making the study of the seven liberal arts the appropriate preparation for the study of theology, and he urged the monks to prepare for their vocation through the systematic study of the arts.

But Cassiodorus was responsible also for making more precise the distinction between the lowly arts and the liberal arts. In spite of the fact that he himself had a knack for mechanical inventions and occupied himself with developing sundails and water-clocks, he argued for making a clear division between the works of the mind and the works of the head. The liberal arts he praised and the mechanical arts he viewed as inferior. For Cassiodorus, the liberal arts were not preparation for the citizen and freeman but the training of the mind for the study of theology, not preparation for life, but a formal sequence that turned away from the world of work and experience and channeled into the professional intellectual activities.

Thus, in time, the arts cycle or sequence became the preparatory pre-university sequence in Paris and Oxford and Cambridge, though in the latter,

the advanced studies were underdeveloped. No longer the encyclios paideia of the Greeks, the stepwise education of the freeman and citizen, the seven liberal arts had in the medieval university become the preprofessional training of the select few who would go on to study in the advanced, or superior faculties, and the emphasis was on the grammar, rhetoric and logic of the trivium. It was this tradition, modified by the English college experience that came to the foundations in the New World.

Three strains.--Harvard was a preparatory school, but since there was no higher or superior faculty to which the graduates might go, their subsequent training was in the pulpit, in the law office, in the political arena. The years at Harvard were calculated to provide the basic knowledge and skill that would enable the graduate to enter with assurance, or at least, reasonable assurance, into any of these positions--with theology a prominent but by no means an only choice. The trivium and a smattering of the quadrivium provided the medium for this training. But New England was also Calvinist territory, and evidence of God's election was to be found in productive work. While for some would-be scholars schola may have implied leisure of sorts, the schedule was intended to be rigorous if not excessively interesting. From the beginning, the New World colleges and the environment in which they were planted might have tried to emulate the monastic life of Cassidorous, but to many the world of the mind and the world of work were not that easily separated.

It was to make a statement about form, ideal and work, that Yale spoke out in 1828. Ticknor at Harvard, Lindsley at Nashville, Marsh at Vermont, Abbott at Amherst and many other lesser known reformers questioned the form and the ideal of the traditional college of the early nineteenth century, and they sought to work out new accommodations between the received

structures and what they perceived to be the needs of the day. Into this setting, the Yale Corporation issued its report defining the nature of liberal education for itself and others who wished to hear.

The object of the college Yale said "is to lay the foundation of a superior education."[6] The college is not designed to include professional subjects; the object is not to "teach that which is peculiar to any of the professions," but rather to "lay the foundation which is common to them all." This foundation education consists of two ingredients, the discipline and the furniture of the mind. The task of the college is to expand the powers of the mind, and also to store it with the knowledge that opened the way to future training. Then, in referring to "separate schools for medicine, law, and theology, connected with the college, as well as in various parts of the country," it used the language of the medieval university in which the higher, or superior, faculties were medicine, law and theology. And, in emphasizing that these advanced schools were open "for the reception of all who are prepared to enter upon the appropriate studies of their several professions," Yale was describing the role of the ancient arts faculties and the residential colleges of Paris and Oxford and Cambridge.

But this preparatory education, said Yale, was not for all; while some would argue "that education ought to be so modified, and varied, as to adapt it to the exigencies of the country, and the prospects of different individuals," such was not the proper role of a college. Rather, the more popular education was the province of the "commercial high schools, gymnasia, lycea, agricultural seminaries," for the college "has its appropriate object and they have theirs."

Condemned and praised, faulted for its adherence to an outmoded faculty psychology and to a subject matter deemed inappropriate to the needs of an

expanding nation, but also held up as a vigorous defense of humanism and the liberal arts, the Report nonetheless had its impact and from that point on the American college curriculum could not be understood without reference to this first major effort to identify the philosophy and content of the American system of higher education (Rudolph, 1977). In the years to come, the description of the liberal arts college in the American system repeatedly would have to redefine the relation between a preparatory unit (whether for two or three or four years duration) the skills and knowledge presumed to be developed in this unit and the way in which the unit is, or is not, to be related to the world of work.

The American college could never remain static in its treatment of form, ideal or in its relation to the world of work. Indeed, most of the next seventy-five years of the nineteenth century were taken up in debates over the proper distribution of the elements in a responsible and responsive collegiate institution. There was the Yale pattern, followed by many, but new combinations and permutations arose with increasing frequency. Nor, did the ideal remain the possession of the independent college. As the American university took form in the later years of the century, there were those who argued for a clean break between the preparatory and advanced professional and technical studies, reserving for the university the advanced studies and for the colleges the preparatory general studies. Others argued against drawing such a sharp line, holding that professional studies without collegiate education was inadequate. The latter view prevailed, and the new American university became an amalgam of the older collegiate ideals and the newer advanced professional studies.

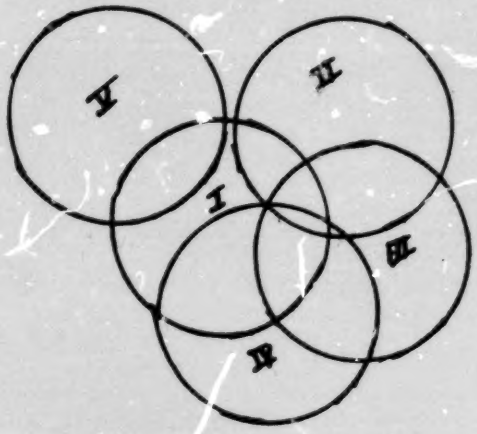
As a consequences of the university assuming a dual nature, there seemed little place left over for the independent liberal arts colleges, and many predicted its early demise.[7] But the older collegiate institutions persisted, and

made their own adaptations to the new conditions.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw the reordering of American higher education into a more systematized structure in which "the college re-emerged as a strong and secure institution within the system." (Leslie, 1976). One of the forms of adaptation was the adoption of the principle of combining breadth and specialization, but the new norm was not established without the surrender of some of what had characterized these institutions for over a century (Herbst, 1965). And the debates continued even as the transformation was being effected. An early study by the Association of American colleges found that students tended to enroll in the more traditional subjects in spite of the expanded opportunities (Kelley, 1921).[8] A few years later, another survey on a broader base recorded a clear difference of opinion regarding the purpose of specialization in the undergraduate curriculum; on the one hand the intensive study was seen as an extension of general studies, and on the other it was identified clearly as having "directly or indirectly a vocational purpose." (Kelly, 1925).

The Belief System of the Contemporary Liberal Arts College

In view of the evolution of the form and ideal of the liberal arts college sketched on the preceding pages, it is not surprising that the group of institutions labeled "liberal arts college" in the 1980s do not constitute a single homogeneous type but of quite a number of subclasses. The appropriate image to display the characteristics is less a continuum and more a cluster of interlaced circles:



While sharing a substantial body of belief, the colleges in this cluster also present broad variations in theme and substance. For some, the path from the Athens of Aristotle to the New World campus in the 1980s may be devious, but it is recognizable. For others, the family resemblance is present, but the relationship seems more like that of distant cousins than of brothers and sisters.

In the broadest sense, this cluster of institutions is marked simply by being essentially undergraduate and free-standing (not affiliated with or part of a more complex university). While allied with the university colleges, they have a history and a role that has remained different, as George Burton Adams (1907) so insightfully observed three-quarters of a century ago, when he wrote, "To the traditional university, retaining the preparatory arts course in the

midst of the professional schools, we have added another arts course, as different in method and purpose as it is in historical origin." Parallel, related, but independent expressions of liberal arts education were developing within their own different contexts.

In the aggregate, this cluster of institutions is the "general baccalaureate" colleges described under the new classifications being employed by the National Center for Education Statistics in the Conditions of Education, 1983 (Plisko, 1983) and used for some years by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. The most common subdivision of this population is that first employed by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in which liberal arts colleges are labeled "Liberal Arts I" and "Liberal Arts II"; the distinction lies between those colleges which scored 1,030 or more on Astin's selectivity index or were included among the 200 leading baccalaureate-granting institutions in terms of the numbers of graduates receiving Ph.D.'s at 40 leading doctorate-granting institutions from 1920 to 1966 (Carnegie Council, 1976); these are the subclass "Liberal Arts I," and the remaining are "Liberal Arts II." And within the latter group are those Astin and Lee (1972) singled out and dubbed the "invisible" colleges, an appelation not altogether graciously received by the class members.

Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984) identified five subclasses of liberal arts colleges evident in the 1950s: (1) Single-purpose, traditional liberal arts colleges, classic and elite; (2) Professional oriented, predominately liberal arts colleges, similar to the first group but placing heavier emphasis on preparing students for further study in selected professions such as law and medicine; (3) Denominational, locally-oriented liberal arts colleges, institutions established to serve a regionally oriented religious denomination, although not necessarily limiting enrollment to students of that church; (4)

General purpose community-oriented colleges, the twentieth century version of booster-type college described by Boorstin (1965) as the prevailing type of the early nineteenth century; (5) Teachers colleges with a liberal arts emphasis, institutions formerly dedicated to preparing teachers but now serving a broader clientele and incorporating a basic core of studies in the liberal arts.

By the end of the 1970s, the five classes could be collapsed into four, as the same two researchers undertook a cluster analysis of the profiles of colleges derived from 1978 Carnegie Survey Data.[9] The working labels attached to the new categories were: (1) Non-professional and non-vocational colleges; (2) Professionally oriented traditionals; (3) Multi-purpose institutions; and (4) Limited multi-purpose institutions (Pfnister and Finkelstein, 1984). The last group could be further divided into two classes, differentiated by breadth of program and relative empahsis on vocational/occupational preparation.

In the final analysis, no typology proves to be wholly acceptable, because the institutions we are examining partake of a broad range of characteristics, have much in common with other institutions in the larger class to which they belong and yet in other respects form the several subclasses noted above. As a consequence, there is always a certain fuzziness attending efforts at creating discrete subclasses of institutions. A specially constituted review committee examining the preliminary findings of the Pfnister and Finkelstein research project suggested that a reasonably adequate approach consisted of a mixed metaphor, an application of set theory that recognizes broad categories of sets and subsets could be combined with the analogy of clusters of cells in which each cell has an identity but also an affinity with a particular group of cells within the larger system (Finkelstein and Pfnister, 1984).

What identifies an otherwise disparate group is, as already noted, their

being essentially undergraduate institutions and free-standing units. In addition, while the particular patterns that emerge may show considerable variation, each of these institutions identifies itself in terms of its response to form, ideal and its relation to the world of work. And the rhetoric employed in the identification process is likely to contain much of what Schmidt (1957) refers to as the component parts of a liberal education:

> A liberal education is not a thing of precise definition like an isosceles triangle, nor is it a fixed list of courses in a college catalogue taken over a given period of years. It is rather a human quality and a personal achievement, which can be attained in a variety of ways. In wading through the voluminous literature on the subject, voluminous because it must remain imprecise, one needs to exercise caution. . . .
>
> Nevertheless, the hundreds who have written about it and the hundreds of thousands who have experienced it are convinced there is something there, and that something is priceless. Its component parts, if anything so vague can have component parts, might be described somewhat as follows. A liberal education means knowledge: verified and dependable about the world of nature and its processes, and about human society both in its historic origins and its everchanging contemporary forms. It means trained skills and abilities: to use one's own language effectively and one or more foreign languages adequately; to think critically--itself a cosmos of more specific skills, to judge intelligently among alternatives; to participate helpfully in social situations. It means appreciation of people, of the moral and spiritual quality of actions; of human imagination whether displayed in painting or music, in poetry or drama, or in mathematics, astronomy, or physics. A liberal education is something like that. (Schmidt 1957, pp. 241-242)

A century and a half earlier, the Yale Corporation had referred to knowledge as "furniture" and asked that each student "should be instructed in those branches of knowledge, of which no one destined to the higher walks of life ought to be ignorant." The specific subjects then noted have a familiar ring, though with the passage of time our categories for describing fields of knowledge have changed. The Corporation also asked that certain skills be developed--reasoning, command of one's own language, a sense of imagination, these and others constituting the "discipline of the mind." In the present-day college we would not want to be limited in library resources, nor committed so heavily to the

"in loco parentis" mentality of an institution serving mostly thirteen, fourteen and fifteen-year-olds; and there are other aspects of Yale 1828 that just do not fit 1984--yet, the rhetoric of the Report and of Schmidt are not that different.

To all of which add the commentary by Thomas Green (1975) that the "relation between undergraduate liberal learning and the world of work is a perennial topic." It is a perennial topic, he contends, because:

> The minimal condition of any good educational system--and perhaps for the survival of any educational system--is that it facilitate some access to adult economic roles or that it provide a way of gaining economic independence. Thus, the problem of the relation between education and work is always present, and any kind of education that eschews a primary concern with this basic problem needs to give it special attention. Such is always the case with liberal studies in the undergraduate college.

Green makes the case for the American perspective, that education must be related to one's economic well-being, and that liberal education especially faces a challenge in reconciling its historic separation from the world of work with the present student-felt need to incorporate preparation for work into the educational experience. And, we have again the persisting triad of <u>form</u>, <u>ideal</u> and relation to <u>work</u> that constitute the axes on which subclasses of liberal arts colleges build their particular structures in the contemporary world.

In summary, the major points in the belief system informing these colleges in the aggregate are:

1. A liberally educated person is both knowledgeable and skillful (in Yale's language, one has the appropriate furniture and discipline of the mind.) By virtue of possessing basic knowledge and skill, one has before himself/herself the maximum range of options for the next stage of education or for entering the world of work. By avoiding specialization, one who has a liberal education can keep the options

open.

2. Although secondary schools have an important part in the general enculturation of youth and in the inculcation of basic knowledge and skill, unlike what is claimed of European schools, the process of enculturation cannot be completed in the American secondary school years, and therefore colleges have a continuing responsibility for completing the liberal education of those who elect further study. (In this line of thinking there is always a residual elitism, because entrance into college, by self-election or institutional-selection is selective and outside the common schooling. It is assumed that a good basic liberal education cannot be completed in secondary schools and that the more adequate experience is reserved for those who proceed to the next level of education.)

3. The goals of liberal education for those selected (or electing) continued education can best be met in institutions that have as their major emphasis the non-specialized, non-vocational education. Moreover, whatever variations in sequencing and length of time is required or employed, the preferable form is four-years of sequential experience.

On these three points there will be general (but not complete) agreement among the undergraduate colleges labeling themselves "liberal arts colleges."

Beyond these three are another collection of beliefs held to varying degrees by varying proportions of the colleges.

4. The task of a liberal arts college is many-faceted, one aspect of which is the provision of a component of common knowledge and skills. Particularly after the Committee on General Education in a Free Society (1955) assured all that "general education" was a more

appropriate term in a democracy for conveying the meaning of liberal education to the many, general education came to be the term and concept preferred by many of the colleges. (The shift in terms used allowed a subtle shift in orientation, for now it was possible for the liberal arts college to think of itself in more general terms and involved in broader educational activities--as long as some component of general education was present.)

5. The proportion of general (or liberal education) in the curriculum has become essentially a matter of the number of courses or activities that will be devoted to this aspect of the program of the college, and since there is (and cannot be) a single best combination, it is necessary for each institution to decide on its own particular combination.
6. The liberal arts college properly is a combination of general education and specialized education. Specialized education is an extension of the general experience of the student in the undergraduate college. (But, a segment of liberal arts colleges will say that specialized study is just that, study calling for a high enough level of specialization to prepare a person for first entry into the job market.)
7. The four years undergraduate experience should be unified. (The search for unifying principles continues, and little agreement is found among the colleges about what the unifying principle should be.)
8. To emphasize that liberal education is the education of the free person/free citizen in twentieth century America may be less relevant for the times than to emphasize that the kind of educational experience needed is one that frees the individual more fully to realize his/her potential. The task of higher education in contemporary America then is not so much to create a new set of common learnings

or commonly accepted learnings but to open opportunities to explore new possibilities and new goals. Liberal education is education for freedom; it is liberating (Gamson, et al, 1984) education.

9. Education must be concerned with the whole person, feelings, attitudes and values, as well as skills and intellectual ability. The peculiar contribution of the liberal arts colleges is (or can be) to enhance one's sense of his/her culture and of values.

There are other elements in the belief structure of the contemporary liberal arts college that parallel the general higher education belief structure, but the points above are those most frequently noted in discussions of what the liberal arts college is, or ought to be.

Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984) found in their study of adaptation among liberal arts colleges a surprising amount of concern about the nature and mission of the college. More traditional and firmly established colleges had consciously and explicitly reaffirmed their historic orientation to the liberal arts. Other groups in the liberal arts cluster were engaged in reexamining charters and other basic documents in an effort to recapture a sense of mission and adapt it to the demands of the current scene. For some of the colleges the process had become one of finding a defensible connection between an earlier stance and the demands of new programs and expanded activities.

Chait (1979) chided colleges for their "mission madness" and for spending too much time writing and rewriting statements of purpose. If that is all that is involved, the colleges were deserving the chiding. But it was the impression of Pfnister and Finkelstein that the new interest in mission was based on something much deeper than rewriting outdated statements; something of the concern expressed by Martin (1982) that colleges develop a sense of character and humaness appeared again and again.

The Resource Base of the Contemporary Liberal Arts College

Bowen (1980) reminds us that the assets of an institution are of two kinds, the tangible and the intangible. The tangible assets consist of land, buildings, investments, current funds. The intangible assets include: the ability to recruit and retain qualified faculty and staff; the capacity to recruit and retain qualified students; ties to sources of appropriations, grants, and gifts; the ongoing internal organization including division of labor, definition or roles, communication systems, rules, customs, traditions, and morale. These intangible assets together make up, or are ingredients of, the "moral capital" that constitutes the ability of an institution to weather crises and maintain educational principles and basic mission. Of the two categories, Bowen contends the intangible are the most important, for even with the loss of tangible assets an institution can recover its position through prudent use of the intangible assets.

In assessing the resource base of the liberal arts college in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is difficult to identify in the aggregate the intangible assets, because these are matters of institutional personality, history, reputation. It is even difficult to deal with the tangible assets in the aggregate with any precision without intensive study of the individual cases, something quite beyond the scope of this paper. For some judgment of the intangible assets, reference will be made to three recent but limited studies of institutional adaptation and recovery (Pfnister and Finkelstein, 1984; Chaffee, 1984; Peck, 1983). For some insight into the condition of the physical assets, much of the data will be drawn from four sources (NACUBO, 1981; Minter and Bowen, 1978; Leslie, et al, 1981; Levine, 1978). The data bases differ among the studies, and the populations vary; yet, from the

various sources it is possible to form a reasonably accurate picture of the contemporary liberal arts college.

The National Association of College and University Business Officers and the American Council on Education, under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, analyzed data for 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978 from the Higher Education General Information Surveys on Finance, Faculty and Institutional Characteristics and the American Council on Education longitudinal enrollment files. Using the institutional classification codes developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, the ACE-NACUBO team developed a comprehensive picture of American higher educational institutions and their financial status, and examined the usefulness of various indicators of fiscal health. Based on data from 831 private four year institutions, roughly the group identified in Carnegie studies as Liberal Arts I and II institutions, ACE-NACUBO provides the following profile:

	1975	1978	Percent Change, 1975-78
Average FTE Students/Institution	1257	1360	+ 8%
Average FTE Faculty/Institution	70	66	- 6%
Part-time to total Enrollment	19.5	21.2	+ 9%
FTE Students to FT Faculty	19.8	20.9	+ 6%

The average size of the institution increased from 1257 to 1360. The FTE faculty decreased over the four years, and the average institution had fewer FTE faculty in 1978. The proportion of part-time students in an institution increased, and the faculty-student ratio increased. From other analyses of the ACE-NACUBO team, we learn that 914 (different base from the 831) private four-year colleges employed 73,000 FTE faculty in 1974, or 21 percent of the faculty employed by all institutions in the sample. These colleges constituted, however, 36 percent of the total number of institutions. The colleges

enrolled, on an average, 1972 continuing education students in 1974, and increased the number of continuing education students by 1976.

Working from a narrower base of just over 700 Liberal Arts I and II colleges, Levine (1978) presents a slightly different profile:

	Liberal Arts I Colleges	Liberal Arts II Colleges
Median number of undergraduates/institution	750-1000	750-1000
Average number FTE Faculty	76	64
Percent faculty with Ph.D.	.57	38
Percent faculty with no professional publication in previous two years	53	69
Percent faculty reporting more interest in teaching than research	82	91
Median size of department	6-8	4-5

Leslie (1981) undertook a detailed study of enrollment patterns for Liberal Arts Colleges I and II over the period 1965-1977. Total enrollment for both classes of colleges increased over the 13 years studied, the LA II colleges increasing at a somewhat greater rate; using 1965 as the base year, by 1965 LA II colleges had grown by a factor of 122.1, and LA I by a factor of 118.9. Enrollment for all types of institutions combined including universities increased during this period of time by a factor of 192.5. Further analysis showed that on the basis of FTE enrollment, the two classes of institutions were fairly similar in the growth rate; the differences between them lay in the increasing number of part-time students in the LA II institutions and the relatively stable enrollment with limited part-time students in the LA I institutions.[10]

Despite the differences in the compilations, the essential characteristics seem clear enough. Liberal arts colleges are small, enrolling usually less than 1,500 students. The faculty numbers less than 100, departments consist

of 4-7 people. Part-time enrollment is increasing, but these colleges are still predominately peopled by full-time students. The faculty are more interested in teaching than in research and they publish infrequently. A substantial number of the faculty are teaching with less than a doctoral degree, although the proportion of doctorates may have increased during the 1980s. There has been some reduction in the number of faculty at these institutions.

How do these institutions appear in terms of fiscal transactions, income and expenditure? The ACE-NACUBO report provides the following profile:

	Proportion of Income, 1975	Proportion of Income, 1978
From Tuition and Fees	50.5	51.2
Gifts	11.9	11.1
Endowment Earnings	3.6	3.2
Appropriations	1.5	1.3
Government contracts	6.1	7.1

These sources constitute an incomplete listing, accounting for only slightly over 73 percent of the income. The remainder is to be found in auxiliary income, which usually ranges around 22 or 23 percent, and the catch-all category, "other." What this table does indicate, however, is the tendency to become more tuition and government grant dependent, at a time when both are shaky sources of income. The Bowen-Minter (1978) report shows a very similar distribution.

In terms of expenditures, the profile is as follows:

	Proportion of Expenditure, 1975	Proportion of Expenditure, 1978
Instruction	30.8	29.2
Research	0.9	0.8
Library	3.3	3.2
Student Services	6.6	7.2

(continued)	Proportion of Expenditure, 1975	Proportion of Expenditure, 1978
Institutional Support	15.3	15.6
Operations and Maintenance	9.3	10.0
Unrestricted scholarships	4.5	4.4

Again, the table accounts for only 70 percent of the expenditures. With the addition of plant expenditures, usually 8 or 9 percent, and expenditure for auxiliary enterprises, the total is complete. The Bowen-Minter (1978) report shows a similar distribution.

In 1971 it was estimated by a number of researchers that up to 70 percent of higher institutions in America were in financial difficulty (Dickmeyer, 1983). Cheit (1971) found a fourth already in difficulty and another 44 percent headed into difficulty. Jellema (1973) estimated that 40 to 60 percent of all private institutions were on the brink of financial disaster and one-half of all private institutions would exhaust their liquid assets in ten years. The vast majority of the institutions survived against all of the predictions. The ACE-NACUBO group found that the recovery or stabilization in most institutions was due to institution of budget controlls by curtailing hirings, services, activities.

What does the future hold? The smaller liberal arts colleges face the most serious dangers (Dickmeyer, 1983). With enrollments less than, 1,000 and with little or no financial reserves, they are the mort vulnerable. This is the same group that the Carnegie Council targeted as the most vulnerable (Carnegie Council, 1980). For most institutions, however, the future will be difficult, and constant monitoring of fiscal conditions will be required.

In the final analysis, however, the survival, or the more than survival, will depend on those intangible assets to which Bowen refers. Keller (1983) in a series of case studies shows how even the well-to-do institutions can

find itself in deep fiscal trouble and how the combination of leadership, reputation, indeed the "moral capital" [supra, p. 25] makes the difference in recovery. Peck (1984) refers to an entrepreneurial and people-oriented leadership that turned a number of liberal arts colleges from near fiscal disaster to relative fiscal health. Chaffee (1984) examined the strategic management responses of two comparable groups of liberal arts colleges facing fiscal decline in the mid-1970s. By 1980 one group had recovered and the other had not. The key to the difference appeared to be the kind of strategic management followed, with a combination of interpretative effort and responsiveness to people being the most effective approach. Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984) found that as critical as the pattern of management and planning was, the basic array of environmental and internal attributes summed up in the term "sociological set" provided the best explanation for successful adaptation.

Major Environmental Forces Impinging on the College

Liberal arts colleges are subject to the same environmental forces that affect all of higher education, but some forces may have greater impact on this group of colleges. The decline in the pool of students in the 18-24 age group will leave few American higher institutions untouched, but liberal arts colleges oriented toward residential students may feel the impact to a greater degree. Shifting patterns of funding will cause reassessment of financial strategy at all institutions, but tuition-dependent small liberal arts colleges may face more critical problems.

But, the liberal arts college constitute clusters, not a single type, and even among these colleges the impact of environmental forces will be different. Colleges with waiting lists are not going to have the same problem as institutions which must wait to adopt a final budget until after the fall enrollment

is determined. The endowment and reserves vary immensely among the colleges. In a sample of seventeen institutions singled out for a special study within their study of adaptation among liberal arts colleges, Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984) found variations in endowment capital from less than $400 per student to over $10,000 per student. One of the Peat, Marwick, Mitchell-Minter reports on ratio analysis (1980) displays charts for private four-year institutions with ranges in annual operating budgets from less than $2 million (N = 31) to those with annual operating budgets of over $64 million (N = 16) out of a total 1979 sample of 359 private four-year institutions.[11]

Recognizing the variations in impact, it it still possible to say anything about the general response of this group of institutions as a whole? The final report of the Carnegie Council (1980) identifies ten contemporary trends, which, in summary form, and paraphrased, are:

1. Rise of the public sector; in 1950 public and private institutions enrolled almost equal shares of the total college population, but by the end of the 1970s private institutions enrolled 20 percent and public enrolled 80 percent of the total.
2. Transition from free sector to regulated industry; federal and state regulations and regulating bodies increasingly set the directions for activity of higher institutions, having an impact upon both public and private institutions.
3. Changing sources of financial support; since the 1930s the trend has been to more dependence on public sources, especially with the creation of the strong public sector, and although there is some effort now to increase private sector giving, support for higher education will be channeled tax monies rather than private gifts.

4. Increasing role of large institutions; institutions of more than 10,000 students enroll one-half of all students in American colleges and universities in 1977, and largeness rather than smallness has become the virtue.
5. Changing public confidence; public skeptism over the worth of higher education has grown through the 1970s, and the public seems to hold ambivalent views about the worth of further education, wanting more education but suspecting that the additional training may not "pay-off in the long run."
6. Changing rates of growth; after 20 years of accelerating growth, higher institutions now live with the prospect of decreases in size, or, at most, a steady state.
7. An aging faculty dominates the staffing of higher institutions; expansion of staff to meet the enrollment increases of the past leave institutions with a surplus, new positions are rare, and the young faculty of the 1960s is becoming the aging faculty of the 1980s and 1990s.
8. College strategies have changed from offense to defense; a feeling of harassment prevades academe, and the move is to dig in, consolidate, prepare for the worst.
9. The composition of the student body is changing, in age and outlook; students are less politically active, less respectful of rules and regulations, less hopeful, more oriented to large institutions and to immediate preparation for employment.
10. The market rules supreme, and the road to survival leads through the marketplace; institutions are marketing industries, and students are consumers.

The trends that are likely to have the greatest impact on liberal arts colleges are the growth of the public sector and increasing role of large institutions, the character of the new students and the supremacy of the marketplace. In addition, a much longer trend, the diversification of the educated society, will have a special meaning for the liberal arts college.

The domination by the public sector and the influence of the large institutions have a particular bearing upon the liberal arts colleges. Already noted [supra, p.27] is the fact that most liberal arts colleges fall into the 730 to 1200 enrollment category. Whereas "bigness" was once a vice and "smallness" a virtue, the contemporary student sees in the large institution the variety of possibilities that have come to be attractive, especially since college education is more and more related to job-entry training. The smaller liberal arts college campus will continue to attract a segment of the student population, but the attractiveness of halls of ivy is considerably less in the latter years of the twentieth century than it was in the early decades.

Even more of a problem for the liberal arts college is the fact that now the majority of American college graduates have experienced only the larger and public institutions; few have any experience with or sympathy for the smaller single-purpose arts college. The experience of the arts sequence in the university college is different from that in a small and independent institution, as Adams (1907) observed so long ago. Yet, whether different or not, the free-standing liberal arts college is no longer the norm of undergraduate education.

The changes in American society in this latter half of the twentieth century will also have an impact upon the way in which liberal arts colleges are viewed--and supported. The liberal arts in the Greek states, the <u>encyclios paideia</u>, implied a common culture, a homogeneity in values and

outlook. In its own way, the far flung culture of the Romans also had a central focus. Americans of the latter part of the twentieth century have no such focus; the prevailing mood is of individualism, differentiation, seeking increasing awareness of, and appreciation of the cultural pluralism that makes up the nation. America is the kaleidoscope that Alstair Cooke (1979) reports in The Americans, and the sole purpose of education is to promote individual growth, even if one is hard put to say much about what kind of growth is desired. Boorstin (1974) argues that the characteristic American college has become "less a place of instruction than a place of worship--worship of the growing individual." And, if subject matters are vague, options numerous, boundaries between "extracurriculum" and "curriculum" undrawn, this is to be expected, because "growth" is hard to define.

Under the circumstances of the emphasis on individuality and the rejection of any sense of common values, it is difficult even to come to some agreement among the traditional liberal arts colleges, as the project of the Association of American Colleges to define the baccalaureate reveals.[12]

From a perspective outside the American culture, Ben-David (1972) sketches the dilemma. He states that the kind of education the American colleges were intended to perpetuate assumes, whether the modern descendants of these institutions accept it or not, that "such education created a superior person. His superiority was asthetic . . . it was also moral . . . Finally, it was an intellectual superiority, since the cultivated mind was capable of the critical reflection and intellectual autonomy of which others were not capable." But, herein lies the American dilemma, for college education in the United States was not meant for a selected few, and in recent years this is clearly the case. It becomes questionable whether the principles of liberal education can ever be an effective principle, Ben David suggests, but if they are, they will be

limited to the few within a few colleges. Conant (1953) echoed the same concern, and Ashby (1971) finds the prime purpose of the four-year college in America quite unclear.

The more the liberal arts college adapts to the new pressures, the more it becomes similar to other institutions. In incorporating the demands of the marketplace, the less recognition it can claim, because it fades into the background of larger and more differentiated institutions that can do the job of mass education much more efficiently. The supreme challenge thus becomes that of achieving some kind of balance which retains what is valued in the original conception of the "arts" and meets the demands of the current marketplace. It is not surprising that a large segment of the colleges classified as liberal arts colleges in 1970 were reclassified as comprehensive institutions in 1976, or that the Carnegie Council found it difficult to differentiate between the Liberal Arts II colleges and the comprehensive institutions (Carnegie Council, 1976).

Undergraduate Baccalaureate Education Within the Liberal Arts College Setting

Given the historical antecedents, the contemporary liberal arts college comes by its bewildering variety of curricular patterns honestly. The story of the liberal arts college curriculum has been one of continuous evolution, the Carnegie Council (1977) observes; the movement has been toward increasing diversity, and in the process, "the new coexists . . . with the old, for there has been little pruning and much grafting." As a result, writes Levine (1978) there is "no such thing as the undergraduate curriculum in America." Each institution has a curriculum that is in some way unique.

The American college grew with little planning, and as observed earlier in this essay [supra, p. 9], many of the colleges founded in the first half of the

nineteenth century were short-lived. The colleges were created in response to local concerns and conditions, and though rooted in the accepted view of what should be taught, there were few that could approximate the ideal of the pure liberal arts college:

> It is sometimes assumed that all of them were "pure" liberal arts colleges, unrelated to work or to the professions. Of course, this was completely true of only a few of them. They encompass a variety of styles. While some came close to being "pure," others were pre-vocational, and the great majority of them mixed liberal education with vocational or professional training. Until recently, one-third of all teachers were trained by liberal arts colleges.

The curriculum of any one college combined the ideal [supra, pp. 10ff] with the local concerns and conditions which established them. Periodic efforts such as that of Yale in the 1820s sought to establish a more common pattern. Yale succeeded for a time, but the variations continued.

It was in the face of threat that the colleges appeared most vigorously to assert or reassert their debt to the older ideal. Eliot's free elective system is credited with the breakdown in the unity of the curriculum at the turn of the century (McGrath, 1966), but in his inaugural address Eliot claimed that the whole curriculum would provide a liberal education; it was only that he did not want the pattern prescribed (Thomas, 1962). Eliot's stance brought the debate to the fore again. Under Lowell, his successor, the college of Harvard University returned to a more structured form, but never to what it had been before Eliot.

Then, the threat of the emerging American university rallied the colleges again and brought forth the Association of American Colleges, but by the 1920s the liberal arts colleges had accepted a combination of basic education and specialized education, even while debating the role of specialized education within that context [supra, p. 16]. Thomas (1962) views the decade of 1920-1930, when the change gained acceptance, as "one of the most important in the

history of higher education in America," because it established the form that has dominated the liberal arts college since.

Having given up the single-purpose orientation and having elected to combine general and specialized education, the liberal arts college entered the second half of the twentieth century with a conventionalized commitment to breadth and depth, but with much debate over the "proper" proportion of each. The curriculum continued to expand, and so did the degrees, until by the 1970s we could identify 650 bachelor's degrees for which "common abbreviations" are listed by the American Council on Education (Carnegie Foundation, 1977). The path from Athens to the contemporary liberal arts college had become devious indeed; to some it appeared to have faded away.

Amid all the variation, the tripartite structure which emerged in mid-century is everywhere evident. And the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching can state in Missions of the College Curriculum (1977), "it is customary to divide the curriculum into three components: general education, the major and electives." The first of the three, general education, also may be subdivided, the Foundation states, into advanced learning skills, breadth or distribution courses, and synoptic courses. Of the three broad areas, general education is a "disaster area," losing ground and having no clear form, the Foundation adds.

Whatever one's judgment regarding the quality or effectiveness of those elements labeled "general education," it is still accurate to use the tripartite division to describe the variations in pattern in the contemporary liberal arts college. Based on studies of developments between 1957-67 within a sample of 322 colleges and universities granting the baccalaureate degree, Dressel (1969) found great variation in patterns, with the median requirement for basic and general education for the B.A. degree at 39 percent, the median

for the major or concentration at 31 percent, and the median for electives at 29 percent. For the B.S. degree the median for general education was a bit lower, 30 percent.

The study undertaken by Blackburn and colleagues (1976) was based on 271 institutions, of which 55 were liberal arts colleges. For the liberal arts sub-sample, the proportion of the total requirements for the baccalaureate distributed between the three segments was in 1966-67: mean of 43 to 45 percent in general education; range of 23-33 to 26-36 percent in major requirements; range of 24-34 to 29-29 percent in electives. (The first percentage is for private Liberal Arts I colleges, and the second for private Liberal Arts II institutions.) By 1973-74, the proportions had shifted: mean of 23 to 31 percent in general education; range of 21-34 to 25-35 percent in major requirements; range of 45-56 to 44-44 percent in electives. The movement was clearly to reduce the general education requirements and increase the electives, particularly in the Liberal Arts I colleges. The major or concentration remained relatively stable.

Levine (1978) observed that while the Dressel study indicated little decline in general education requirements from 1957 to 1967, the Blackburn study revealed a significant decline from 1967 to 1974. His own report reveals considerable spread in general education requirements, from virtually no requirements to 80 percent in some few institutions. The medians appear to be 31 to 40 percent of general education for the A.B. and the same for the B.S. For the major, the requirement constituted from 31 to 40 percent, and electives were allowed 30 percent.

The Missions of the College Curriculum (Carnegie Foundation, 1977) reflects the same decline in requirements in general education found in the Blackburn study; in fact, the data in that report are adapted from the Blackburn report.

The Missions Study, however, also documents the considerable difference between Liberal Arts I and II institutions in curriculum and student outlook. A high proportion (71 percent) of the students in Liberal Arts I institutions consider themselves intellectuals, while 66 percent so reported in Liberal Arts II institutions. Only 19 percent of the Liberal Arts I students would be prepared to leave college for a job, while 31 percent of the Liberal Arts II students would so choose. On the other hand, 70 percent of the Liberal Arts II students said that it was essential to get a detailed grasp of a special field while in colleges, compared to 53 percent of Liberal Arts I students who answered in the same way.

Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984) have reported that all of the colleges included in their site-visits had reviewed the general education requirements at least once during the decade of the 1970s; several had been engaged in an almost continuous review during the time and had shifted from prescribed sequences to a virtually open curriculum and back to a more structured form. In general, the more traditional liberal arts institutions (predominantly Liberal Arts I institutions) had during the decade tended to decrease requirements on the proposition that the entire curriculum emphasized the liberal arts. The institutions that had moved toward or embraced the more comprehensive structure tended, almost as a way of insuring some kind of "liberal arts emphasis," to build in more specific requirements in general education.

How do we generalize for such a disparate group of institutions? We can say that on the whole the curriculum in liberal arts colleges at the beginning of the 1980s is almost evenly distributed (33-33-33 percent) between general education, major and electives, but there is great individual variation within this pattern. The more selective and traditional colleges tend to decrease the requirements in general education and increase options with the electives,

while the less selective institutions tend to maintain the 33-33-33 divisions. The debates continue over proportions of the curriclum to be devoted to each aspect of the undergraduate experience, and the particular composition of courses within the general education component varies greatly. Levine (1978) identifies three categories of structure for general education--core, distribution, free elective--and notes that there is considerable evidence that over time institutions tend to move across the categories in pendulum-like fashion.

The indefiniteness and almost continuous flux in the curriculum among most liberal arts colleges may be distressing to those who would like to see more order and structure, but in summarizing on the mission of undergraduate education, the Carnegie Foundation (1977) states, "The curricula of modern colleges and universities can no longer be governed by the unified cultural objectives of colonial times. Instead, our heterogenous society and extraordinary increase in knowledge . . . pose genuine dilemmas . . . Today, in a pluralistic society, our degree requirements are stated in terms of specific course or areas of study and are seldom accompanied by a rationale for the selection course or areas of study and are seldom accompanied by a rationale for the selection of courses offered."[13]

Moreover, within the liberal arts colleges, as well as within higher education more generally, the curriculum as a whole has become more oriented toward the student as consumer and his/her concern for occupational training (Carnegie Foundation, 1977; Riesman, 1981). The liberal arts college has long been involved in working out its relation as historically oriented to the non-vocational to the world of work, but in the contemporary world it appears clear that most college students and their families continue to view colleges primarily as an avenue to financial security and status (Blocher and Rapoza, Chickering, 1981).

Matters of Vulnerability

Liberal arts colleges until the second half of the twentieth century were the model for all of higher education; other types of institutions defined themselves in relation to the oldest and, until the 1950s, most numerous of higher institutional forms. That these institutions now attract a decreasing portion of the total college enrollment and that the real number of liberal arts institutions appears to be decreasing (Carnegie Council, 1976) raise questions about the continued viability of the institutional type. Wallis (1965) contends that colleges "that confine their efforts to undergraduates will find themselves relegated, by the end of this century, to the position occupied today by the good preparatory schools. In fact they will not be in as good a position. . . ."

The statement by Wallis is reminiscent of statements made a century ago when other university presidents stated that the liberal arts colleges had only two choices, to become universities or to attempt to be good preparatory schools. The colleges have frequently confounded the forecasters and may do so again. However, that they have survived provides no guarantee that "in the face of a new kind of challenge the usefulness and vigor of this distinctly American institution will continue undiminished." (Bell, 1966).

In More than Survival, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1974) identifies the special factors in the contemporary world of higher education that challenge this continued existence:

1. The value of their curricula is being called into question by the trend toward vocationalism.
2. They are more severely affected by the cost-income squeeze than are most other categories of institutions. They are generally small, without any substantial economies of scale and even a slight decrease in enrollment moves them back up a steep cost curve that reflects high fixed overhead costs.
3. They are generally unitary institutions and it is hard to lop off any sizable endeavors in order to cut costs.

4. Because of their location and fierce sense of independence, movements to merge or to form consortia of these institutions have produced few major results.
5. Since they rely most heavily on tuition, they are very vulnerable to competition from public institutions.
6. Their current search for new vocational programs to supplement teacher education may attract students, but it raises fears that they may be compounding their problems by diluting their main strengths and offering vocational work which cannot compete, particularly with that offered by the comprehensive colleges.

References has already been made to most of these factors, but this particular summary points up the potential weaknesses of a significant portion of the liberal arts population. The critical element is their ability (or inability) to retain their historic orientation while adapting to the expectations of the contemporary student; the line on which the balance is reached is a fine one indeed--a weighing of factor number 1 against factor number 6. If the colleges can remain attractive to a large enough segment of the college-going population, then they will be able to meet the problems suggested in the other four factors.

In the More than Survival volume as well as in Three Thousand Futures (Carnegie Council, 1980) it is concluded that the selective liberal arts colleges have a high probability of surviving, maintaining enrollment and program, but that the less selective are among the most vulnerable of institutions. It is probable that the selectivity factor is less the reason for the strength of the one segment over the other than that the stronger institutions have developed the kind of attractiveness that makes it possible for them to be selective. If an institution has established its niche in its own geographical region, or in the nation as a whole, then the other things are added unto it. These stronger institutions have amassed the intangible resources and "moral capital" [supra, p. 25] which make them attractive and able to survive. Building that moral capital, however, is difficult when one is on the border of

financial distress. The institutions that need the slack to build strength are the institutions that do not have the resources to provide that slack.

Have most liberal arts colleges, like the dinosaur, now come to the end of their useful service? Will the survivors, the 123 Liberal Arts College I institutions, remain the only examples of the free-standing liberal arts college? Or, Phoenix-like, are other institutions able to take new life and a place among the survivors. Both metaphors may fit. The dinosaur was long-lived, and actually adaptable to a long period of earth history. A certain segment of the liberal arts colleges appears to have the strength to continue into the twenty-first century. Others are adapting to the new conditions and maintaining or reaffirming identification with the liberal arts ideal. These are institutions that probably constitute a new class, a group of institutions standing between the purely comprehensive and the purely liberal arts.

Even with substantial numbers of survivors, the free-standing liberal arts college as known in the past will not return to a dominant position in American higher education. But the persistence of a significant number of these institutions could continue to call to the attention of academe the heritage of the liberal arts and could continue to have an influence for excellence in higher education quite beyond their size and number. Stadtman is right, "the liberal arts cannot be served in the special way that is possible when they are virtually the exclusive concern of an institution." (Stadtman, 1980). Or, as Van Doren (1959) wrote: "The future of American education, like its past, is bound up with the institution we know as the college. The American college is the one place where liberal education can keep its heart whole. Whether this will be done depends, as always before, not only upon the faculties of colleges but upon their students, not only upon alumni but upon parents; and increasingly it depends upon the view of education that is held everywhere . . ."

Notes

1. In his chapter on the classical tradition, George P. Schmidt(1957) makes the statement, "The Path from the Athens of Aristotle to the New World Cambridge of Dunster and the Williamsburg of Blair is devious but recognizable."(p.43). He continues,"The Aristotelian body of knowledge and method of thinking was modified by Roman and Moslem additions, then almost lost to the Western world in the centuries of barbarism that followed the disintegration of Roman civilization. It reappeared, diluted and fragmented in the lectures of the masters of arts who were combining in the thirteenth century to establish the University of Paris." It is this latter development that I seek to explain on pages 10-13 of this essay. Schmidt provides more than most writers regarding the development of the ideal of the liberal arts as applied to Western Europe and later the United States, but it is my conviction that many assumptions about the Western heritage of the liberal arts as a direct legacy from Greece leads to a misunderstanding of what the American liberal arts colleges were about well into the nineteenth century and a misunderstanding of some of the tensions affecting them in the twentieth century.

2. The study to which reference is made developed out of a two-year project funded by the Exxon Education Foundation and designed to examine both the kinds of adaptation found among liberal arts colleges during 1970-1980,and the processes by which the adaptations were effected. The project was directed by Allan O. Pfnister of the University of Denver and Martin J. Finkelstein, now of Seton Hall University.

3. The demise of the liberal arts college has been predicted since the turn of the century. John Burgess was writing in 1884 that he was unable to understand what might ultimately become the role of colleges that did not become universities or fall back into being preparatory schools. "I cannot," he said, "see what reason they will have to exist." Jordan of Stanford was saying the same thing in 1903. But the colleges persisted and grew in number and size through the first half of the twentieth century. Leslie(1981) shows how they continued to grow through the 1970s. See Pfnister (1980) for an extended monograph on the development of the college.

4. It is mistakenly assumed and stated that the universities grew out of the colleges during the medieval university building perid. The opposite is the case; the form of the college arose in response to the needs of the university. The tradition of the liberal arts in the West, of course, preceded the development of both university and colleges, but work in the arts was required for admission to the universities. Initially the universities made little or no direct provision for young scholars to gain the requisite preparation; the students were on their own. Only later did the college become the carrier of the liberal arts insturction. Cobban(1975) contends that the colleges of the medieval universities do not always receive the emphasis they deserve; they "were destined to occupy a commanding position in the universities of northern Europe,/ and/ they merit more sympathetic treatment." (p. 122)

5. For a morethorough treatment of the developmentsee Pfnister(1980), a monograph that traces the development of the idea of the college from the Collège de Dix Huit to the English colleges at the time of the Elizabethan statutes of 1570 and through the subsequent modifications of the form in England and the United States.

6. Quotations from the Yale Report of 1828 are from Hofstadter and Smith(1961) Volume 1, pages 275-291.

7. John Burgess had written in an essay entitled "The American University: When Shall It Be? Where Shall It Be? What Shall It Be?" in 1884 that he could see little place for the independent liberal arts colleges. Thirteen years later, in 1904 in an article "The College in the University," George Burton Adams (1904) accepted not only the possibility of coexistence between the free-standing college and the university college, but he argued that the combination of the two gave the United States the best of both worlds, the German University and the heritage of the English college, both contributing in different but important ways to American higher education.

8. In addition, it should be observed that the four-year structure was the standard form of the college. There was a brief flurry of interest in turing the liberal arts curriculum into a three years, or less, segment. The journals carry a number of proposals for such a development in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Charles W. Eliot of Harvard was an outspoken advocate of the plan.

9. With the cooperation of Verne Stadtman of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the researchers were able to obtain the data tapes of the 1978 Carnegie Survey of Institutional Adaptations to the 1970s for a convenience sample of 84 colleges classified as Liberal Arts I or II in 1970 by the Carnegie Commission and had responded to the 1978 survey. In this sample were 37 institutions that had remained the liberal arts category and 47 that had been reclassified by 1976. The identity of individual colleges was maintained confidential by Carnege and only a code number appeared on the individual data.

10. Leslie's (1981) summaries of enrollments for the liberal arts colleges show that LA I institutions added few new programs, while LA II expanded rapidly in many directions. The market approach was reflected more clearly in LA II than in LA I institutions. One may ask, as did Leslie, whether this expansion of program, which secured enrollment gains, might not also have changed the nature of the colleges. Certainly, the Carnegie reclassifications in 1976 suggested that for the Carnegie classifiers at least the expanded program colleges looked to be different institutions -- more akin to "comprehensive colleges and universities."

11. Employing data gathered by John Minter Associates in the annual surveys of financial status, the accounting firm Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co., with John Minter developed a series of indicators of fiscal health; colleges were characterized by annual operating budget and endowment.

12. In 1982 the Association of American Colleges launched a three-year project to attempt to "revive a consensus among the faculty, deans, presidents and trustees on the meaning and purpose of baccalaureate degrees," according to Mark H. Curtis, president of the Association. In 1982, Theodore Lockwood wrote on of the first essays regarding the development of the consensus. ("What Should the Baccalaureate Mean?" Change, 14, November/December, 1982, pp. 39ff.). It was obvious by that time that no consensus was forthcoming; instead there would be several essays to describe categories of prevailing points of view. The article by Roger L. Geiger, "The Curriculum and the Marketplace," in Change for November/December, 1980, pp. 17 ff, is an excellent analysis of the way the "consumer" influences the diretion of the colleges -- and suggests why the consensus sought by AAC is unlikely to be forthcoming.

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